

## CLARK TESTIMONY ON SB 143 REGARDING BISON MANAGEMENT IN MONTANA

THE STATE CAPITOL, JANUARY 31, 2013

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Mike Clark, Executive Director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, based in Bozeman.

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition has been involved for almost 30 years with the question of how to manage the migration of bison out of Yellowstone Park. I have personally been involved for 19 years.

GYC has provided financial assistance to landowners in the area who have had property damaged by the hazing of bison by the Department of Livestock and it has worked to raise money and public support for projects in the Gardiner Basin to reduce conflict between landowners and wild bison.

In 1996, for example, leaders of the Church Universal and Triumphant asked GYC to assist them in carrying out a large land exchange between the Church and the Forest Service. I engaged the Forest Service and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and we successfully reached an agreement that transferred some 7,000 acres of land into public ownership and provided a way for the church to consolidate its holding in the area.

We oppose SB 143 for a number of reasons and I wish to mention four in particular.

1) SB 143 prohibits any bison from migrating from Yellowstone National Park into Montana by requiring state officials to remove, shoot, slaughter, or sell any wild bison that move across Yellowstone's boundary. This no-tolerance approach is in absolute conflict with, and usurps, the joint management plan under which Montana and the federal government, in consultation with tribes, have operated for over a decade.

2) In 2011, a diverse group of Montana citizens- - including local landowners, Gardiner Basin residents, livestock producers, hunters, and conservationists - met monthly for over a year and reached consensus recommendations for expanding tolerance for Yellowstone bison in Montana. SB 143 would completely disregard these citizen working group recommendations that call for expanded habitat for Yellowstone bison in Montana for extended periods of time.

3) SB 143 prohibits the translocation of bison originating from Yellowstone National Park to anywhere in Montana, with the exception of the National Bison Range. That means that tribes that want these live bison would no longer be able to get them and, instead, the bison would most likely be killed. These bison have important genetics and we support the relocation of healthy bison to the tribes and other lands in the West where their rare genetics could be protected and used for breeding purposes.

SB 143 returns Montana to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century days of unregulated bison slaughter by establishing year-round, state-wide, unlimited hunting of bison throughout Montana.

4) GYC has for decades encouraged Montana to establish a public hunt for Yellowstone bison that migrate from the Park. We believe well-regulated public hunting, supported by modern wildlife management strategies is an appropriate tool to manage the bison population. We believe the public supports this approach.

The year-round unlimited hunt for bison can be dangerous for residents and visitors, will be highly controversial and give Montana a black eye world-wide. If enacted, it will be a set-back for Montana, which has made great strides in its management of bison compared to the 1980s and 1990s.

We respectfully ask you to reject this legislation.